

Washington, DC – Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA), Ranking Democrat on the Energy Subcommittee of the U.S. House Committee on Science today questioned the economic rationality of domestic nuclear fuel reprocessing technologies as well as the impact of reprocessing on energy efficiency, nuclear waste management and weapons proliferation. Honda’s doubts were raised during the Energy Subcommittee’s examination of the Bush Administration’s proposed Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) program.

“What troubles me about the GNEP proposal is the haste with which it has been developed,” said Honda, “and that a closed circle of people have made all of the key decisions without much input from industry or the scientific community.”

Witnesses before the Subcommittee represented a range of viewpoints, several raising similar doubts.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology n
uclear and mechanical engineering professor
Neil Todreas testified: “Serious decisions
remain unresolved about [GNEP’s] pace,
including technical readiness, facility processes
and scale, and the consequences of redirecting
most of the available funding for nuclear energy
to this effort.”

Dr. Richard Garwin, IBM Fellow Emeritus
at the Thomas J. Watson Research
Center, testified that, “Many of GNEP’s
goals and timelines are just unrealistic.

Such an enduring program ought to be
considered in light of long-term budgets

rather than near-year expenditures.”

Garwin echoed Rep. Honda’s assessment that Administration decisions have been made before essential research has been completed. “GNEP R&D priorities are simply insufficient to make decisions across a wide range of critical areas – from reactor cooling methods to which

fuels will power fast-neutron reactors,” he said, concluding, “GNEP is an unnecessarily expensive, hastily formulated program, not the deliberative, transparent process critical for success.”

Likening the GNEP decision-making process to

President Bush's Iraq war planning, Rep. Honda noted, "The Administration's policy decisions have already been made by a closed White House club, ignoring critical facts and shunning outside expert input," he said. "They first make decisions, and then tailor convenient justifications for sale to Congress."

In conclusion, Honda voiced concern about the Department of Energy's (DOE) openness to external advice, noting that reports about the "disbanding of the Secretary of Energy's

Advisory Board – which was chartered to provide the Secretary with timely, balanced external advice – only reinforce the impression that outside input is unwelcome on major programs such as GNEP that are critical to America's economy and national security.”

The full text of
Ranking Member
Honda's statement is
included below:

** **

Opening Statement of Rep. Mike Honda

Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Energy, Committee on Science

April 6, 2006 Hearing on the proposed Global Nuclear Energy Partnership

I thank
Chairwoman
Biggert for

holding this
hearing today
so that we can
learn more
about the
Global Nuclear
Energy

Partnership,
which President
Bush
announced
without
providing much
detail in

February with
his budget
request.

As we all
know, currently
the United
States does
not reprocess
nuclear spent
fuel because of

concerns
about the
proliferation of
nuclear
weapons
material.

In addition,
reprocessing
is not cost

effective,
since uranium
supplies
around the
world are
plentiful and
can be

fabricated into
fuel at far less
cost than
reprocessing
spent fuel.&nb
sp;
The

economics of
this situation
have not
changed and
are not going
to change for
a long time.

Which brings
us to the real
reason that

the Bush
Administration
is putting
forward a
nuclear fuel
reprocessing

program – the
problem of
dealing with
nuclear
waste.

The politics of Yucca

Mountain
have made it
clear that
siting and
licensing a
second

waste
repository is
highly
unlikely.&nbs
p; At
this point, it

still isn't clear
how things
are going to
proceed with
Yucca
Mountain.

The Bush Administratio

n has seized
upon this
political
situation to
justify
reprocessing

of spent fuel
to reduce the
heat of the
material that
would
potentially

be put in
Yucca
Mountain in
order to
expand the
capacity of

the proposed
repository.

Yesterday
the
Administrati
on sent a
legislative
proposal to

Congress to
expedite the
repository
which would
lift the
current

statutory
limit on the
amount of
waste that
could be
stored there.

Such a
move is
essential to
justifying
developing

a
reprocessing
program.

 sp;

What
troubles me

about this
whole
Global
Nuclear
Energy

Partnership
proposal is
the haste
with which it
seems to

have been
developed
and the fact
that a very
small

number of
people
seem to
have made
all of the

key
decisions
without
much input
from

industry or
the
scientific
community.

 sp;

For

example, it
appears
that the
technology
for

reprocessing
spent
fuel,
UREX+,
has already

been
selected by
the
advocates
for the

program.&n
bsp;
While the
final
decision

hasn't been
made, it
seems that
the
decision

has
essentially
been made
to use
metal fuel,

which
would
require the
construction
of a

pyroprocess
sing plant
for each
fast reactor
that will be

used to
convert
reprocesse
d fuel into
electricity.

 sp;

What isn't

clear to me
is who
made
these
decisions,

what
process
was used
to make
those

decisions,
or even
why they
have
already

been
made,
given the
premature
stage of

the
technologies
and huge
uncertainty
as to

whether
they will be
successful
and cost
effective.

 sp;

The spent

nuclear
fuel we
have now
can safely
be stored

in dry
casks for
50 years
or more,
giving us

plenty of
time to do
more
research,
more fully

evaluate
technology
alternative
s, and
have

greater
engagement
from all
interested
parties in

the
decision
making
process.

For a

program
that may
cost as
much as
hundreds

of billions
of dollars
in
taxpayer
money, it

seems
that such
study and
scrutiny is
the least

we can do
to ensure
that the
best policy
is what is

pursued.

 sp;

From
where I
sit, the
way that
the Global

Nuclear
Energy
Partnershi
p has
been put

together
and then
proposed
looks a lot
like the

way in
which the
President
took the
nation to

war in Iraq.

 sp;

The policy

decisions
have
already
been
made by

a small,
isolated
group
within the
Administr

ation
without all
of the
facts and
without

input from
experts
from
outside
their

group.&n

bsp;

Once that

decision

was

made,
then a
justificatio
n for it
was

develope
d and
sold to
Congress.

 sp;

A story
posted on
the
website

of the scientific journal Nature

yesterday
about the
disbandin
g of the

Secretary of Energy's Advisory

Board,
which
was
chartered

to provide
the
Secretary
with

timely,
balanced
external
advice on

issues of
importance,
only
reinforces

the
impression
n that
outside

input is
not
welcome
on major

programs
such as
GNEP.

 sp;

But as
with Iraq,
there
seem to

be major
uncertain
ties in
GNEP,

uncertain
ties in the
technical
feasibility

, the cost,
and
uncertain
ty in the

ability of
the
agency in
charge to

successfully
carry
out such
a large

effort.

 sp;

I don't
believe
that it is
wise for

us to
rush to
judgment
on GNEP

as we
rushed to
war, and
I

certainly
don't
want to
see the

kind of
outcome
that a
rushed

decision
and
incomplete
plan

are sure
to
deliver.&
nbsp;

This
decision
doesn't
need to

be made
today,
we have
other

means
for
storing
nuclear

waste
temporari
ly while
we wait

for all of
the facts.

 sp;

In
closing,
Madame
Chairwo

man, I
thank
you
again for

holding
this
hearing
so that

we can
try to get
some
answers

on how
these
decision
s were

made,
we can
hear
some

outside
thoughts
on this
proposal,

and
perhaps
hear
some

alternativ
e options
for
dealing

with the
problem.